

# *The Historian*

*of Hancock County*

*Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi*

*March 1996*

## **MARCH MEETING**

The next luncheon meeting of the Historical Society will be held at the **Lobrano House** at noon on March 21st. Our speaker will be Admiral Paul Gaffney of the Naval Oceanographic Command. His subject is "The impact of the Navy on the history of Hancock County".

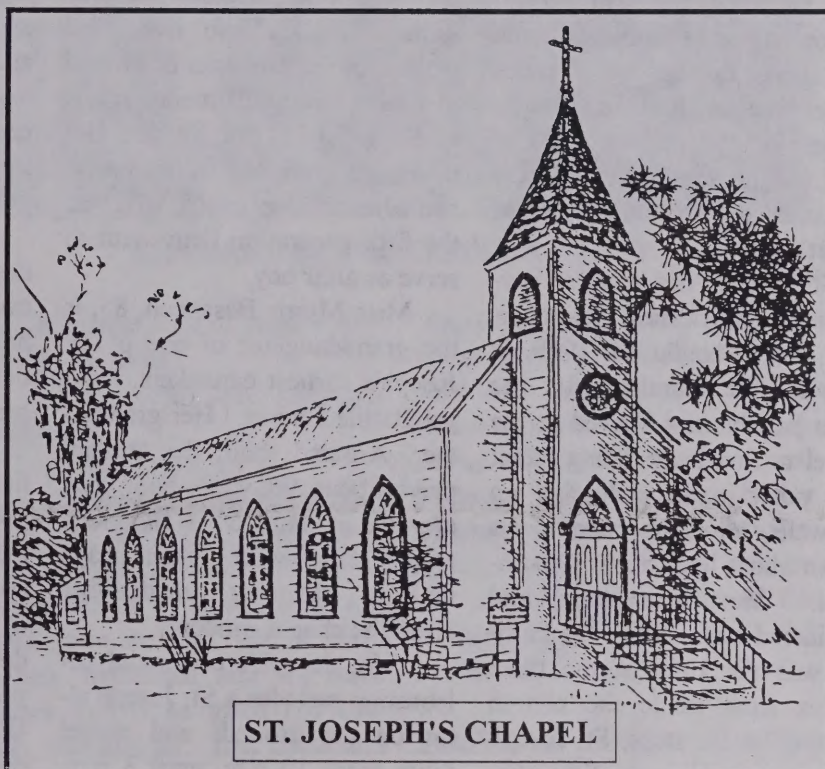
Please call 467-4090 for reservations as early as possible. Since this is our first meeting in our expanded facility, we need all the advance notice we can get.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Do you remember the addition that we planned to build behind the Lobrano House? Well, we've done it! Just in case you have forgotten, or perhaps weren't even born then, we ran a store, sold furniture and junk, manned a "Show house" and saved our pennies for several years for this purpose. Although not complete, it has a floor, walls and a roof.

We contracted with Franke Brothers Construction of Pass Christian to build the room on a cost-plus basis. I told Mr. Franke that we had only \$20,000 to spend and explained that when that was used up, he didn't have

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**ST. JOSEPH'S CHAPEL**

## **ST. JOSEPH'S CHAPEL CENTENNIAL**

St. Joseph's Chapel has served Catholics of the Cedar Point area of Bay St. Louis for 100 years. A special celebration is planned for March 19, commemorating the first Mass observed in the Victorian chapel on Dunbar Avenue at Blakemore.

A mission chapel of Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church, St. Joseph's is one of several built by the Rev. Henry LeDuc, OLG pastor from 1859 until 1897.

Rev. LeDuc earned fame in 1864 when he saved Bay St. Louis from destruction by federal troops during the Civil War. A group of 200 Union soldiers came to the town to rescue prisoners held by the Confederates. The Yankees, determined to burn down the town, were confronted by Rev. LeDuc near OLG church holding a crucifix aloft. The federal soldiers, mostly Irish Catholics, ceased firing and doffed their hats. Union Street received its name from this encounter.

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(St. Joseph's from page 1)

Rev. LeDuc, affectionately called Pere LeDuc by local Catholics, built many churches in the area, including Pearlington, Waveland, Bayou Cadet, Bayou LaCroix and Bayou Binanchoa. By 1879 he served 13 missions in addition to OLG Church.

St. Joseph's was built on a portion of the former Cowan Plantation, owned by Charles Sanger who sold it to the Catholic Diocese of Natchez for \$25 in 1895. After the Biloxi Diocese was created, jurisdiction shifted to that office.

St. Joseph's has survived several severe hurricanes. Its condition after Camille in 1969 is legend. The morning after the storm parishioners arrived at the chapel to find the building intact with water marks eight feet up the walls, all doors open, pews strewn about like so many toothpicks. Most astonishing, and considered a miracle by the faithful, was the sight of the three statues from inside the church standing on the steps, St. Joseph in the center. Not one of the statues incurred any damage.

The history of St. Joseph's is replete with names of early residents whose descendants are still among us.

Sedonia Adam, wife of Thomas, was the first caretaker of the chapel. The couple were the adoptive parents of a child from a New York "Orphan Train", Willie J. Adam, now age 90 and living in Gulfport. Thomas's parents, Emile Adam and Evelina Nicaise, were the very first couple married in St. Joseph's in April 1896.

The late master builder Jimmy

Larroux helped build the addition to the church after the 1947 hurricane and continued to do maintenance work for years. He served as usher and bellringer for most of his life. Larroux's mother, Marguerite Backman, served as organist from 1906 until the late 1940's.

A number of descendants of Italian families who lived and worked in the canneries or farmed in Cedar Point still maintain ties to St. Joseph's like Charles Benningo, an altar boy in his youth, and Michael Benvenuti, who was the fifth generation Benvenuti to serve as altar boy.

Miss Myrtle Besancon, 85, is the granddaughter of one of St. Joseph's earliest caretakers, Anagel Battile Ladner. Her grandfather, Armand, built the original pews about 90 years ago; they are still in use. Miss Besancon recalls standing on a chair at age nine to help her grandmother clean the chapel windows.

St. Joseph's centennial celebration includes a St. Joseph altar on the grounds and chapel tours from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. Mass will be celebrated at 5 p.m. with the Right Reverend Joseph L. Howze, Bishop of the Diocese of Biloxi the principal celebrant assisted by Reverend Peter Mockler and Monsignor Gregory Johnson. A reception and dinner at OLG in the evening will conclude the festivities.

For further information, call Betty Benvenuti at 467-6057.

Edith Back

(President from page 1)

to stop, but that the money would. Mr. Franke used every means possible to help us build

an excellent facility and he has diligently sought to secure the best values for us.

Our new meeting room will be 1350 square feet. Perhaps the greatest obstacle was moving the vault to its new location. Mr. Franke astonished me by rolling it over small water pipes. We have a stage for speakers, a public address system, florescent lighting and a 40 foot long computer bank. The Kitchen, with a large pass-through is marvelous. Our future luncheon meetings will necessarily be wonderful.

Since ALL of our money was designated for specific construction costs, we know that we will have to wait for certain goodies, but still, there are angels. These are a few of them.

Clara Matousek who formerly lived in Bay Saint Louis learned of our need and paid for our complete five-ton heating/air-condition system! Every hot day of every summer and every cold day of every winter, we will appreciate this great donation. Clara, thank you several times over.

Ann Onymous (not her real name) was concerned when she learned that we have NEVER had hot water at Lobrano House so she donated the 40 gallon water heater that we wanted. Thank you Ann.

Ruth and Jim Thompson have donated a Maytag dishwasher for the kitchen. This will be especially appreciated the third Thursday of every month after luncheon meetings when we don't have to carry the dirty dishes across the street to Ruth's Cakery to wash them. Thank you Ruth and Jim.



Melinda Richard, president of *Cather Ye Rosebuds*, has spearheaded a movement to plant a rose garden in the front yard as soon as the construction is finished. I do not yet have a list of those who donated rose bushes, but will report them next month. However, June and Jim Bell have volunteered to design and install the garden in our sunny areas. Thank you Melinda, June and Jim.

In the past, we have been given older copy machines that could not handle our volume. We now send out four hundred *Historians* each month plus our regular work, so we have bought a new Sharp copier. Actually, "Buying" is a more accurate term. It was a \$3000 machine. We got a thousand dollar trade-in on our old one and Ann Onymous (not the same Ann Onymous who bought the water heater) paid \$500 down. We owe \$1500 but if we can pay it off within 90 days, there will be no interest charged, or we can pay it out in installments. Thank you, Chamber of Commerce for the old machine we traded in and thank you Ann for the \$500.

In case you haven't noticed, we have a good thing going here. Therefore, just in case there are any other angels out there, I thought I would list the few remaining things which we need.

40 folding chairs - Cost \$6.50 each.

4 eight-foot folding tables - cost \$40.00 each.

Carpeting, probably around \$1500.

Kitchen Cabinets - We hope to have these built.



### LOBRANO HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

A curtain for our stage - Any sewers out there?

Fixtures for our handicap bathroom.

Handicap ramp.

There are other things that we need but I am reluctant to mention them because I am so overwhelmed by how much you have given already. We are completely functional and **we have never had it so good.** Thank you, one and all. Just come and use your wonderful Historical Society home. Your grateful President, Charles Gray

Oaks (formerly Camp Onward) are progressing nicely but we still need volunteers, especially for the Easter weekend. If you can volunteer a few hours on Good Friday, Saturday or Easter Sunday, please call Mickey Burns, 467-5358. That will be one of the busiest weekends for visitors and we need to have the house well staffed.

### LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MON. 8 to 4 or by  
TUE. 8 to 4 appointment  
THU. 8 to 4

### ANNUAL DUES

If you have not had an opportunity to pay your membership dues for 1996, this would be an especially good time to do it.

### ONWARD OAKS

Plans for showing Onward

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

KATE LOBRANO HOUSE - 108 CUE STREET  
or  
Mail - POST OFFICE BOX 312  
Bay St. Louis, Mississippi 39520

*Hancock County Historical Society*

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